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WASHINGTON AS I FIRST KNEW IT.  
1852-1855.

BY BYRON SUNDERLAND, D.D.

(Read before the Society, May 6, 1901.)

The beginnings of our city are no Eastern fable. The official documents relating to it are well preserved and abundant. Many writers have contributed to its history, and whoever has carefully read the volumes of our late, lamented Dr. Busey—going over the whole ground with such painstaking research, will be likely to regard the recollections of any subsequent narrator simply as an “oft-told tale.”

I have been asked, however, to describe the city as I first knew it—say from 1852 to 1855 for then my acquaintance with it began. At that time it seemed like an overgrown, tattered village which some late hurricane had scattered along the river’s edge. As best I can I will here relate my story of the city, subject to any corrections as to faults of my memory in the details by those who may care to undertake them.

At that time many of the old landmarks had been swept away; great changes had come over the site of the town. The plan of the city approved by Washington, whose great name it was to bear, had been chiefly laid out and the city proper lay within the limits of boundary line (now Florida Avenue), Rock Creek, the Potomac and its Eastern Branch. As we all know the Capitol Building was to be the point of reckoning from which the four quarters of the city should be distinguished and the streets crossing each other at right

angles were already named—those running east and west by the letters of the alphabet, those running north and south by the ordinal numbers. In this place also were centers from which the avenues named for the several states should radiate, crossing the streets at angles of various degrees and so defining the parks, squares, circles and triangles. The two principal centers were the *White House* and the *Capitol*. The present method of numbering the houses was not then in vogue, and confusion in finding the place sought for was often the result.

Within the city limits already indicated, at the period of which I am speaking, scarcely one third of the space had been built up. At the Navy Yard stood the Marine Barracks and a cluster of village buildings in the midst of which stood the “*Christ Church*” as it stands to this day. And beyond these toward the east was the city workhouse and the “*Congressional Cemetery*.” But the commerce with Bladensburg, which had been so lively on the Eastern Branch one hundred years ago, had wholly ceased and the center of interest at the Navy Yard was the manufacture and trial of the Dahlgren guns, under the supervision of the Admiral himself. Between the Navy Yard and the east front of the Capitol large open spaces intervened, with here and there a clump of houses, or single structures with specific objects, such as the Marine Hospital and the venerable pile in Maple Grove, now the property of Mrs. Briggs. Many of the buildings were private residences, or boarding houses, an industry then as now actively pursued, and with even more emphasis then than now, for at that time hardly a prominent man connected with the general government had a house of his own in the city. So on First Street east—now the Library grounds—stood a block of buildings for residences called

the “Duff Green Row,” and just to the north of them on the corner of A Street stood an ample structure of brick where Congress held its first sessions and which was afterwards made the prison of captured Confederates, and where Wurtz was finally hung, but it has since been turned into three spacious mansions, one of which has been for years the home of Justice Field where he recently died and which his family still retain. In those days the Navy Yard and the Marine Barracks were centers of interest to all visitors at the Capitol—and especially for the fashionable young people who patronized the drills and dances of the Barracks, while not seldom the funeral train was passing by, following some dear one to the silent city of the dead—so closely are smiles and tears commingled in these mysteries of human life.

From the Navy Yard westward along the Eastern Branch to Greenleaf’s Point (so called from the man who owned it once) was a wild and broken stretch of land with here and there a hovel or a house—and the stouring of brick kilns—as in those days the chief industry there was brick-making—while that part of the city south of the Capitol and east of Four-and-a-half Street had scarcely yet been developed with equal pace to that of other parts.

At Greenleaf’s Point the government buildings and general appearance were about the same as they are to-day—the Penitentiary, the Arsenal, the officers’ houses, the artillerymen’s quarters, the grounds shaded by patriarchal trees and thickly set with cannon and cannon bases. This place was subsequently made memorable as the scene of the trial and execution of the conspirators for the murder of President Lincoln.

For a considerable distance to the north of this point and spreading along the Mall were the houses and struc-

tures of southwest Washington, then known as the "Island." It was made so by the construction of the Washington Canal formed in the days of Jefferson to connect the Eastern Branch with the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal at its terminus near the foot of Seventeenth Street, N. W. This was a stone-walled ditch varying in depth from ten to fifteen feet and in width from forty-five to one hundred and fifty feet. Starting from a point near the Navy Yard it met the Tiber in the Mall a little south of Pennsylvania Avenue and followed the course of that stream to its mouth at the foot of Seventeenth Street on the Potomac. Where it cut the streets, it was spanned by high, iron bridges connecting the Tobasco with the rest of the city. But in 1853 it had ceased to be regarded as anything more than a huge sewer for the reception of the offal of the city, for down to that period, even in the most thickly settled portions of the town, the open squares and spaces were exposed to the incursions of dogs, geese, ducks, pigs, cows and mischievous boys, where many a prank was played.

The Mall and the White Lot, lying much as they do to-day—disfigured then by no railroad tracks, but much more so by the nauseous canal—was then, as since, the scene of many a gathering and parade and pleasant drive, covered in many parts by stately forest trees and various undergrowths with intervening lawns and meadow lands with footpaths and carriage-ways running from the botanical gardens and conservatories down to the government pools by the river's brink. As I remember it in 1852-5 only three structures had been reared upon it: The government armory, where it stands to-day; the Smithsonian Institution, then recently completed, in charge of Professor Henry and a formidable body of regents of most notable men—and affording the only public lecture hall known in the city—and

the Washington Monument, then simply a huge stone stump about two hundred feet high and surrounded by piles of memorial stones intended for its walls, the gifts of individuals, societies, companies, states and foreign powers. Among them was the stone of Pius IX. One night it disappeared and has never been found. It was in the days of the "Know-nothing"! This monument, now happily completed, stands exactly at the right angle of a triangle the other two points of which are the White House and the Capitol, Pennsylvania Avenue being the hypotenuse. Some day perhaps it may be surrounded by another structure in memory of the famous dead of the nation.

Along the north side of the Mall, from Sixth to Fourteenth Streets, were numerous lumber yards, sawmills, planing mills, brass and iron foundries and coal yards, and between these and the avenue extending from Seventh to Ninth Streets the Center Market, which since that time has undergone great change. From this point outward to the northern limit the river-side sections of the city were sparsely covered with buildings. Rock Creek, a narrow but famous stream, spanned by one or two modest bridges, divided the municipalities of Washington and Georgetown as distinctly as if they had been located hundreds of miles apart. House-building had been chiefly pursued from Rock Creek on towards the Capitol and between Pennsylvania Avenue and M Street, and, with the exception of here and there a single structure or tenement or a small cluster or clump of buildings, the entire space between M Street and the boundary was an open field. Kalorama, the estate of Joel Barlow, was a part of it and the rest went by the mellifluous names of "White Oak Slashes," "Swampoodle" and "Hell's Bottom"!

Between M Street and Pennsylvania Avenue then as

to-day were Washington Circle, the White House grounds, the Jackson, Franklin and Judiciary Squares, and between I and M and Seventh and Ninth Streets was the "Northern Liberties Market," the present site of the new free library now being erected. The boundary line cut off from the city Eckington-Harewood, the Soldiers' Home, Druid Park, Meridian Hill and a part of Kalorama. It was in these parts that the principal stream of the town, known as "Goose Creek," took its rise. Fed by a number of springs and small tributaries, it skirted along southwardly by the foot of Capitol Hill and through the broad acres of one Alexander Pope who, seeing that his name was Pope, thought it no robbery to be equal with the Pope and so named his farm Rome and the hill the "Capitoline" and the stream the Tiber, by which it was afterwards known. Indeed in those days the whole site of the city abounded in springs and slender streams from which many wells in many of the streets were well supplied, some of them of a decidedly mineral and medicinal character. The city was also partially supplied from a large reservoir on the heights of Georgetown. The water supply with the growth of the city, at an immense cost to the government, led, in after years, to the great Lydecker fiasco.

The gas office stood on Tenth Street, where it does to-day, which, in connection with the street oil lamps, was the only earthly common source of our evening light.

So many writers have so graphically described the noted houses and their famous occupants and portrayed in brilliant colors the social and political life of Washington, the points of attraction, the fashionable centers and the personalities of the great leaders—both men and women—and have recorded so many amusing and thrilling events and adventures that any attempt to recount them here would be a bootless task.

I may, however, mention that in 1852-1855, beside the government buildings already named, there were the National Observatory in the extreme northwest of the Navy quarters in the rear of what is now the White House conservatory, the War Department in Winder's building, the State Department in a building on the corner of Fifteenth Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, the Treasury building, the General Post-office building, the Patent Office in which was the National Museum, and the Marine Hospital eastward toward the Navy Yard. At this time also the present dome of the Capitol was being erected by the noted architect Thomas U. Walter, and the Capitol grounds between First Street west and First Street east were surrounded by a strong stone coping surmounted by a tall iron fence, the gates of which were locked at night. The fountain at the rear of the building fed from a spring in the direction of the present Howard University, with its darting gold fish, played freely then as it does to-day.

Close at hand was Robey's slave pen and auction block, several such being still open in different parts of the city; but as that system went completely out of the District in April, 1862, we gladly pass it by.

Such then were some of the principal physical features of the city in 1852-1855. The steamboats and sailing vessels then, as now, plied from the city docks up and down the river to Alexandria, Mt. Vernon and so on to Hampton Roads, and thence outward to the sea. The only foot-path or carriage-way into Virginia was the Long Bridge erected in Jackson's time, succeeding one over which it is said Madison fled on the approach of the British in 1814. But this point has been questioned, and the Aqueduct Bridge substituted. In those days likewise the only railroad approach to the city was the Baltimore and Ohio, the occupancy of

which there in the central part of the city and right across the splendid north Capitol Street all improvement of which it has long shut out, was then as it is to-day, a public eyesore and temptation to much quarreling. Disputes have been held over it, and for many years the only light shed upon the subject was from a *Garret* in Baltimore!

In 1852-1855 the wonderful agency of electricity had just begun its mission in the Morse telegraph wires from the Capital to Baltimore, while the first attempt to propel a car by electric magnetism was made about that time by Professor Charles Page of the Smithsonian Institution. He had actually run his car three or four miles toward Bladensburg and back again, but of course it was a mere platform on four wheels loaded with giant horseshoe magnets, a mere embryo which I remember to have seen at the Baltimore and Ohio Station, lying by the roadside discarded, but nevertheless the first fruits of the splendid equipage we see to-day! But the time of the telephone, the bicycle and the automobile was not yet. With the exception of the statue of Washington in the square and of Columbus with his ball in front of the Capitol, of Jefferson in front of the White House and of Jackson in the opposite square there was no open air statuary of any kind whatsoever. Such of the streets as were paved at all were covered with coarse rubble stones such as continue in Alexandria to this day. A line of lumbering omnibuses ran to and from Georgetown along Pennsylvania Avenue, bordering which were still standing some of the linden and poplar trees planted in the time of Jefferson. Several times that famous thoroughfare was in parts so inundated as to be navigable by flat boats for two or three hours together. While in winter time covered with a heavier fall of snow than has been usual in later years,

it presented a lively scene of vehicles of every imaginable style on runners flying up and down with merry jingling bells!

As in every growing town the freak is always in evidence, so at the time of which we speak the city was favored with two of the primest sort, one for each sex, Beau Hickman and Anne Royall, the latter editor and proprietor of the *Huntress*. The biography of these people is very entertaining. There were also in the city two noted women who had long been before the public, Mrs. General Eaton née Peggy O'Neale and Mrs. Myra Clark Gaines, the alleged heiress of the city of New Orleans. The last time I had the privilege of looking on these remarkable women was when I chanced upon them on the sidewalk in front of my own residence in C Street, while they were engaged in a furious altercation over the merits and demerits of General Jackson. They had met there by chance—Mrs. Eaton tall and stately—and Myra Gaines, petite and sinewy—it was a sight to behold. Dr. Mary Walker had not yet appeared; *he, she or it* was a product of the Civil War!

The census of 1850 gives the population of the city in its seven wards as 37,941 whites, 10,059 free colored and 3,687 slaves—in all, 51,687 souls; dwellings, 6,345; families, 6,730; school children or persons under thirty years of age, 20,186 whites, 5,352 negroes; deaf and dumb, 19; blind, 24; insane, 23; idiotic, 13; common schools, 20; teachers, 31; pupils, 1,989; academic and private schools, 35; teachers, 71; pupils, 1,494; whole number in school, 4,553 whites, 420 free blacks; slaves none; illiterates, 1,004 whites, 2,674 free blacks. Of newspapers—classed as literary and miscellaneous, five daily; neutral and independent, five semi- or tri-weekly; political, eight weekly. There were six public libraries, aggregating 64,500 volumes. It also records the churches as follows:

6 Baptist.....	Seating 3,460 persons	Cost \$29,300
5 Episcopal ....	" 4,200 "	" 43,000
1 Hebrew—Space and cost not reported.		
2 Lutheran.....	Seating 1,000 persons	Cost \$15,000
13 Methodist ....	" 7,960 "	" 50,900
5 Presbyterian ..	" 3,500 "	" 56,000
1 Quaker .....	" 200 "	" 1,000
4 Roman .....	" 4,700 "	" 70,000
1 Unitarian ....	" 500 "	" 10,000

There are also statistics of the farm, garden and vine-yard products—costs and receipts which I here omit. This census likewise gives a list of no less than 183 specific forms of occupation with the number of persons engaged in each, from the President of the Republic down to the humblest pile-driver. Comparatively few women were then employed in government departments. As a sort of appendix to the city government there were several fire companies with hook and ladder attachments in different parts of the city, as the "Anacostia," the "Perseverance," the "Franklin," the "Union," the "States Union" and the "Columbia." These companies were as effective as could be expected, considering the condition of the hydrant system and the arrangement for forcing the water from the hose. The "Columbia" company at this time had found a generous patroness in Mrs. Jackquinne Mills Pendleton and had their quarters nicely fitted up where lectures were given by prominent men quite on the lyceum order. The husband of Mrs. Pendleton was in those days the prince of gamesters, and his famous house on the avenue was the constant resort of some of the most noted public men of the time. A shameless house, the notorious Mary Hall house, stood on the corner of Maryland Avenue and Four-and-one-half Street, S. W. It is now an extensive dispensary devoted to humane purposes.

As to education, the paper of my friend, Mr. J. Ormond Wilson, read before this Society in 1896, gives a clear and exhaustive account of it from the beginning. But at the time of which I am writing, beside the four district schools, conducted by such men as Henshaw, Watkins, McCormic and Thompson, there were several academic and private schools, some of the more prominent of which I distinctly recall, as the Gonzaga Roman Catholic, Samuel Helly's "Clock School," as it was called, Wight's "Rittenhouse" Academy, Bicherd's "Union" Academy, Young's "Emmerson Institute," McLeod's "Order" School, Madame Burr's school for young ladies, and several others, where music, painting and other accomplishments were taught. The Spencrian College was then just opening. And closely allied to this means of improvement was the art gallery of James McGuire on E Street, the larger one built by Mr. Corcoran adjoining his residence on H Street and the library of Peter Force, which was crammed from top to bottom with his collections in a long old ramshackle building on the northeast corner of Tenth and D Streets, N. W. To this we must add also the valuable collections of Dr. Jones at his residence on Louisiana Avenue, a man beloved and respected on all hands, whom I was proud to count as my personal friend for many years. All these points were places of continued usage by the public and a source of intelligent and refining influence on the community at large.

The boarding house system as it prevailed in those times shared its hospitality with the hotels which were multiplying with the rapidly growing population and the increase of travel. Among the leading hotels were the National, the Metropolitan, the Kirkwood, the Ebbitt and Willards. Others less prominent were the United States, the Mansion House, Exchange Hotel, Gadsby's,

the St. Charles and the Temperance House. Once there was at that time a temperance society composed entirely of Congressmen. On my first visit to the city in September, 1852, two days after the adjournment of Congress that year, I was a guest at the National. A year or two after, many of the guests of the National were prostrated with a singular sickness, and a few deaths ensued. Several theories were advanced as to the cause, such as the presence of arsenic in the wall paper recently put on; or the injurious effects of some preparation used to rid the hotel of rats. Finally the matter was investigated by Dr. James E. Morgan and Dr. Robert King Stone and found to have had its origin in imperfect sewerage.

The centers of attraction for visitors of course were the White House, then without its conservatory, the Capitol with its Library, the Navy Yard, the Treasury, the National Museum, the Dead Letter Office and the Smithsonian.

As to the churches of that period—of the Roman Catholic was St. Matthew's, the leading court church, Father White, pastor; St. Patrick's, Father Walter, pastor; St. Peter's, Father Boyle, pastor, and the German Church on Fifth Street, St. Mary's, I think, whose pastor I never met. Of the Baptist churches—the Rev. Mr. Meador's Church on Virginia Avenue, South Washington, and he remains to this day the only one of all the ministers of his denomination who were then active here; the E Street Church, whose pastor was Dr. Sampson, a very earnest, learned and philanthropic man, and the church of Dr. Hill on Tenth Street, afterwards Ford's Theater, where Lincoln was assassinated and which is now the Record and Pension Division of the War Department. Of the Episcopal order was old Christ Church, Rev. Mr. Morsell, rector, near the Navy

Yard. This church, owning the Congressional cemetery, derived then, as I believe it still does, a large revenue from it, though Congressmen have well-nigh ceased to be buried or to have a memorial stone set up there; Trinity Church, Rev. Clement Butler, rector; Ascension Church, then on H Street, whose rector was Dr. Pinckney, afterwards bishop. This church is now at the corner of Twelfth and Massachusetts Avenue, N. W. Epiphany Church on G Street, I think Rev. Mr. French was rector, and St. John's Church, Rev. Pyne Smith, rector. The Unitarian Church, whose pastor was the afterward noted Moncure Conway; the Lutheran St. Paul's, Rev. J. G. Butler, pastor, who still flourishes as the honored pastor of the church at Luther Place; two other Lutheran churches, one on Fourth and E Streets and one at G and Twentieth Streets, N. W.; the pastors I cannot remember.

The Quaker meeting house and the Hebrew synagogue held meetings on their own principles as the rabbi ordered or the spirit moved them.

The principal churches of the Methodist people were the Foundry Church, Wesley Chapel, Hamline, Ryland, McKendry, Mt. Vernon, Fletcher and Waugh Chapels. A Protestant Methodist church stood on the east side of Ninth Street, between E and F Streets, N. W. As their system of rotation caused frequent changes of pastors, my memory is at a loss to specify the pastors of the several churches. But I call to mind some of the names of those noble brethren, Lanahan, Baldwin, Davis, Lemmon, Slicer, Morgan, Milburn, Granbury, Stockton and De Shields.

The Presbyterians had the First Church to which I was called; the F Street Church, Dr. Laurie; the Second, with Rev. Mr. Eckart; the Ninth Street Church, Dr. Smith; the Assembly's Church, Mr. Carothers pas-

tor; the Sixth Street Church, Dr. Mason Noble, and the Fifteenth Street Church (colored), of which Rev. John Cook was pastor, and to-day the highly respected pastor of that church is the Rev. Mr. Grimke.

Of the number of colored churches and their pastors, most of whom were either Baptists or Methodists, I am not able to give a reliable account. One of their congregations I know worshipped in the little "White Chapel under the Hill," which they had purchased from the First Church, but whose walls are now buried by the grading along Pennsylvania Avenue south of the Capitol.

The two chaplains of Congress were Slicer of the Senate and Milburn of the House. Divine service was held by them every Sabbath in the House hall during the sessions, and great audiences of the members, officials and of the general public attended. Quite a number of ministers without charges were in the employ of the Government and in other capacities in the city. Some of them I can now recall, as Messrs. Danforth, Galligher, Sewall, McLain, Ralph Gurley and Tustin. Dr. Tustin had been chaplain of the Senate and was very finical. He always had on his visiting cards, "Rev. Dr. Septimus Tustin, late Chaplain of the U. S. Senate." The churches were all engaged more or less in the cause of temperance, social reform and home and foreign mission work.

The American Colonization Society, then an important feature in philanthropic enterprise and founded by such men as Bushnell, Washington, Clay, Webster, Francis Key and many more equally prominent men, had its headquarters here as it has to-day. It was then in its full tide of operations and was the object of the fiercest and most bitter denunciations of the Abolitionists. As a specimen of the feeling it engendered, I give

the prayer of Father Spoonden, a colored preacher of Boston.

"Oh Lord, we pray that that seven-headed, ten-horned monster, the Colonization Society, may be smitten through and through with the fiery darts of truth and tormented as the whale between the sword-fish and the thrasher!"

Notwithstanding all this the most cordial feeling of fraternity prevailed among all the Protestant churches here. They were all represented in the Young Men's Christian Association, then a new organization, and in the Sabbath School Union. For the children there was always an annual street parade with indoor and outdoor exercises and picnics and excursions, a favorite point of rendezvous being a brook-fed spring on the Virginia side under the heights of Arlington. On many occasions union prayer meetings were daily held, going from church to church, beginning with old Christ Church, near the Navy Yard, and ending with the F Street Church, which has recently been displaced by a new building in the rear of Willard's Hotel. But we then had no Christian Endeavorers, no Central Union Mission, no Salvation Army, no Daughters of the Revolution, no great world gatherings in the interest of science, charity or religion. But we did have the annual conventions of the Bloomers and Woman Suffragists under the lead of such noted women as Mrs. Stanton, Susan Anthony, Isabella Beecher Hooker and many others of like general fame.\*

The earlier Presidents usually attended the Episcopal

\* I may here mention also that it was in these days that occurred the first visit to the Capitol of the noted Rochester Fox girls, which marked the beginning here of the singular development of what is known now by the name of modern spiritualism, which, notwithstanding many exposures of pretenders seems more firmly fixed in the minds of many people than ever before.

churches, as did Van Buren, Tyler and Arthur subsequently; John Quincy Adams, the Second Presbyterian and Unitarian churches; Jackson, Polk, Pierce and Monroe, the First Presbyterian; Buchanan and Lincoln, the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church; Grant and McKinley, the Metropolitan Methodist; Johnson was a Pomponian; Hayes went to Foundry Chapel; Garfield to the Christian Church; Fillmore to the Unitarian Church; the second Harrison to the Church of the Covenant, and Cleveland to the First Presbyterian.

As to the social life of Washington during the Pierce term, while the usual receptions were held at the White House, there was an evident shadow over all from the recent affliction of President and Mrs. Pierce in the death of their last living child and son by a railroad accident in the previous autumn. And I may say here, though the President was not then a member of any church, he most scrupulously regarded the Sabbath, and no Government business was ever done in the Executive Mansion on that day, but every Sabbath morning the whole household was assembled for family worship conducted by the President himself if no clergyman were present. The General was an inveterate church-goer, often attending three services the same day and frequently the mid-week prayer meeting. He became exceedingly unpopular with a large portion of the people by signing the Repeal of the Missouri Compromise Bill, and many looked upon him as a moral monster. On the last Sabbath of his term, being present in the church at the close of my sermon, I made a brief allusion to his departure and the pleasant relations he had borne to the church. This was heralded by the reporters and the next issue of the *New York Tribune* gave me particular fits, calling me by the endearing names of a pulpit cad, lickspittle and other euphonious names!

But at that time there were in the high circles of social life in Washington many other centers of activity; they were visiting and calling and banqueting, marrying and giving in marriage, as in the days of Noah. At that time the grand wedding of Bodisco to the pretty schoolgirl, Miss Williams, of Georgetown, occurred. On New Year's day the whole city turned out to call on its neighbors and spend the whole day in compliments and wassail, making new acquaintances and reviving old ones—a custom less in vogue, I think, in these later years. But there was little to compare with the visiting-card calling, teaing, dining, wining, dancing, flowering and the general output of splendid equipages and over-whitening furbelows of the present time.

Yet it was as in the days of Noah and they knew not when the flood came, for already dark clouds were gathering in the political firmament. The whole country was in angry turmoil and here at the center history was being made amid the sharp contests and bitter discussions of the Capitol, and earthquake signals of dissension and separation in church and state. Our municipal elections were attended with violence and bloodshed. Men went armed for duels, free fights and unseemly scrimmages of every sort. Charges and counter charges, blows and bludgeons resounded through the Halls of Congress, and outside on the public streets. It was a day of doom growing darker with anxiety and distress every hour, till no man could tell the heart of his neighbor, whether friend or foe. Lines were drawn through families, neighbors, churches and a great hatred sat like a nightmare on the breast of the people. It was the presage of our Civil War, that awful tempest of fire and blood which broke upon the land in 1861.